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TAGS: PGOV PTER PHUM MOPS NP
SUBJECT: 600 ELECTION CANDIDATES WITHDRAW; MORE MAOIST
VIOLENCE

REF: A. KATHMANDU 228

B. KATHMANDU 245

Classified By: AMB James F. Moriarty, reasons 1.4 (b/d)

SUMMARY

11. (U) More than 600 people withdrew their candidacy between filing to participate in the municipal election on January 26 and the deadline to withdraw on January 28. Some people withdrew voluntary, others claim the government forced them, and still others wished to withdraw but security forces "protected" them and did not allow them the opportunity to withdraw. Suspected Maoists shot a mayoral candidate in the Kathmandu Valley on January 30. Sporadic, but heavy, fighting between Maoists and security forces continued in eastern and western Nepal. Political parties, journalists, and lawyers have termed February 1, the one year anniversary of the King's takeover, "Black Day," and have called for nationwide protests. End Summary.

HUNDREDS WITHDRAW CANDIDACY

12. (C) The January 28 deadline to withdraw candidacy for the February 8 municipal election saw approximately 600 candidates pull out of the race. Tejmuni Bajracharya, Spokesperson for the Election Commission, explained nominations were withdrawn due to "pressure from families, political and various other reasons." Bajracharya told Emboff that 3,654 candidates had initially filed for candidacy for the total of 4,146 available positions. This could leave an estimated 1300 candidates still seeking positions. Although the press reported 2,104 vacant posts without candidates, Bajracharya claimed there were just 174 posts. However, Informal Sector Service Sector (INSEC), a human rights NGO, reported that more than 50 percent of the seats were vacant. Arjun Naryan K.C., Central Committee Member of the Nepali Congress Party, stated that fifty percent of the seats were vacant. K.C. stressed that the Parties still planned to "disturb" the election, would not endorse it, and would prevent election winners entering municipal buildings to perform their duties. He noted that

the public would not support the election as most of the candidates were without political experience and with low social status, such as truck drivers and beggars. Regarding reports that some candidates were taken to police or army barracks for protection, K.C. and INSEC commented that some of these candidates went voluntarily to the barracks and others were forced to go. Security forces subsequently allowed them to leave the barracks after January 28, having no doubt prevented some potential withdrawals. The press carried numerous reports of tearful family members beseeching their relatives to withdraw due to Maoist threats.

UNOPPOSED CANDIDATES DECLARED WINNERS, THEN RESIGN

¶ 13. (C) In 22 of the 58 municipalities, the Election Commission declared 44 unopposed candidates for Mayor and Deputy Mayor, and an unspecified number of Ward Chairmen and Members, winners on January 29. However, 16 immediate resignations, with more likely to come, followed this announcement. In Kathmandu, a total of 69 (out of 144 candidates) for ward chairmen, members, and female members were declared unopposed winners. Bajracharya noted that the Election Commission was not charged with keeping track of resignations once candidates were elected. An Embassy source claimed that in Kapilvastu District (western Nepal), Home Minister Kamal Thapa had instructed the District Administrative Office to force the withdrawal of all candidates not in his faction of the Rastriya Prjantantra Party (RPP) to ensure his candidates would be declared unopposed winners. A candidate in Damak municipality (eastern Nepal) said he was detained in a room until he agreed to take his oath of office, which he did, then he resigned soon thereafter.

MAYORAL CANDIDATE SHOT BY SUSPECTED MAOISTS

¶ 14. (U) On the afternoon of January 30, suspected Maoists shot and injured a mayoral candidate in Lalitpur, an urban area neighboring Kathmandu, located inside Kathmandu's ring road highway. This is the second Mayoral candidate that has been shot recently (ref A), and the first inside Kathmandu Valley.

PARTIES, JOURNALISTS, LAWYERS CALL FOR FEB. 1 DEMONSTRATIONS

¶ 15. (U) The Parties, the Federation of Nepalese Journalists (FNJ), and the Nepal Bar Association (NBA) have called for nationwide demonstrations to observe what has been termed "Black Day" on February 1, the anniversary of the royal takeover, to protest one year of crackdowns on political and press freedoms. The Parties have announced a mass meeting in central Kathmandu's Durbar Square, to be attended by senior Party leaders. The FNJ and NBA have called for all their branches and units across the country to observe "Black Day."

MAOIST VIOLENCE, THREATS CONTINUE

¶ 16. (SBU) Maoists continued their violent campaign against cities and district headquarters, bombing various places throughout the country over the past several days, although no civilian casualties were reported. On January 27 in Nepalganj, Maoists bombed a police office and other central public areas. Security forces also defused one bomb at the Nepalganj city hall. On January 28 in Tulsipur Municipality (mid-western Nepal), Maoists bombed the home of a candidate, causing extensive damage. On January 28 in Jaleshwor (south-central Nepal), Maoists bombed the District Administrative Office, District Development Office and the Government Lawyer's Office; in Baglung district (western Nepal), Maoists bombed the Ward 9 Municipal Office and set fire to the Ward 10 Municipal Office. On January 29 in Guleriya (western Nepal), Maoists bombed the District Development Office. In Siraha District (south-east Nepal), five Maoists were killed in an explosion while making bombs

in a home. The Maoists released a press statement on January 28 threatening "severe consequences" against participants in the February 8 municipal elections (septel).

MAOIST - ARMY CLASHES IN EASTERN NEPAL

17. (SBU) Maoist rebels attacked the Royal Nepalese Army's (RNA) Ghodetar base camp in Bhojpur District (eastern Nepal) at approximately 5:30 pm on January 27; fighting lasted through the early morning of January 28. Major Ganesh Bista of the RNA's Public Relations Office said at least 21 Maoists died and confirmed reports that two security personnel were killed. Reports also indicated that the RNA brought in at least one helicopter with night vision equipment to strike Maoist positions.

ONE CIVILIAN KILLED IN NEPALGUNJ

18. (U) A civilian woman was killed by crossfire during clashes between Maoists and the Armed Police Force (APF) in Nepalganj (western border town) on January 29. Fighting ensued after Maoist rebels reportedly opened fire on an APF van near the district police office around 6 pm. Nepalganj was the sight of recent heavy fighting (ref B).

COMMENT

19. (C) The mass withdrawal of candidates, resignation of some unopposed election "winners," and the ongoing violence and threats against candidates mean that the elections will likely end up a farce. The government cannot yet provide security against Maoist threats and violence. Post expects continued Maoist violence and demonstrations by the Parties in an effort to disrupt the elections, if the King does not bow to pressure to postpone the polls.

MORIARTY